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General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

18th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 30 September 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Wangchuk (Bhutan): It gives my delegation immense satisfaction to see Mr. Julian Hunte in the high office of the presidency, not only because of his wide experience and his proven abilities, but also because Saint Lucia — a small country like Bhutan — has assumed leadership of the General Assembly at this critical juncture of its history. We are confident that, under his able leadership and guidance, our deliberations on the many important and challenging issues that confront our world today will be fruitful. Let me also take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Jan Kavan for his excellent stewardship of the fifty-seventh session. His presidency enhanced the esteem of the international community both for himself personally and for the Czech Republic.

My delegation would like to pay a special tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dynamic leadership and his tireless efforts to revitalize the United Nations and to enable it to assume its rightful role at a very challenging time in our history.

We have gathered in this magnificent Hall year after year, bound together by a common vision of a peaceful, prosperous and just world. The end of the cold war renewed our hope to bring to fruition our collective aspirations, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The historic Millennium Summit ushered in a sense of optimism that we could bring about a world free from want and fear. Unfortunately, the horrific events of 11 September have shaken the very foundations of our nascent faith in our ability to deliver a new era of peace and prosperity. The situation in Iraq is a serious challenge to the international community. Three years ago, we stood united and confident about the prospects in the new millennium, providing a ray of hope for millions around the world. Today, sadly, we stand as a house divided, uncertain about the future and unsure whether we can rid the world of the vicious circle of conflict, poverty and fear that has plagued humankind for centuries.

It is clear that international peace and security and the eradication of poverty remain the most pressing challenges confronting the international community. What must be recognized is the undeniable, but often overlooked, fact that those overarching goals are interlinked and cannot be achieved in isolation. There can be no prosperity without peace and security. At the same time, peace and security cannot be sustained if billions are deprived of the basic necessities of life. Our collective resolve to combat the menace of terrorism must be matched with an equal commitment

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to eradicate the scourge of poverty, which afflicts more than half of the world's population.

We welcome the President's intention to focus the Assembly's efforts on implementation of the outcomes of United Nations summits and conferences, including the Millennium Development Goals. The realization of a new economic order that is inclusive, equitable and sustainable is an imperative that must be pursued with renewed focus and resolve. The Millennium Declaration provides a clear set of targets and steps to be undertaken to achieve them. The Monterrey Consensus, the Doha Development Agenda and the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development provided further impetus towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Yet 33 countries that together account for 26 per cent of the world's population are reported to be off track on more than half of the Goals. The lack of progress so far is indeed disconcerting.

While emphasizing the need to accelerate the implementation of commitments made by both developed and developing countries at various international conferences, my delegation would like to highlight the critical need for adequate financing mechanisms through trade, investment and official development assistance. In particular, my delegation hopes that the special needs and vulnerabilities of the least developing countries, of the landlocked developing countries and of the small island developing States will be comprehensively addressed, as called for in the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, in the Almaty Declaration and in the Barbados Plan of Action, respectively.

Of the 33 countries that are off track in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 23 are in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the need for special attention to Africa. My delegation calls on the international community to lend its full support to the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. International support is particularly crucial for countries emerging from conflicts, for without the rehabilitation of social and economic infrastructure, progress in peacemaking cannot be sustained. In that context, we hope that the international community will also provide the necessary support to the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq as they endeavour to rebuild their nations under the most trying circumstances.

Every Member State has the responsibility to eradicate poverty and create an enabling environment for peace and security. It is in the mutual interest of all nations, small or large, developed or developing, to collectively promote global prosperity and peaceful coexistence.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nagoum Yamassoum, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of the Republic of Chad.

Mr. Yamassoum (Chad) (*spoke in French*): As in the past, and despite present ordeals, Chad, my country, is very glad to take active part in this meeting of peoples united by the same fate and motivated by the same spirit of peace, justice and equality.

I am convinced that the wise choice of someone with the experience and requisite skills of Mr. Julian Hunte to preside over this historic meeting will guarantee the success of the session. My country has assumed similar responsibilities within the previous Bureau and knows just how consuming yet exalting they can be. My delegation would also like to express its encouragement and congratulations to Mr. Hunte and other members of the Bureau. My delegation and I, personally, would like to assure him of our complete availability and full support for the success of his mission. We would like to reiterate our deep gratitude to him and especially to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jan Kavan, for the skill and enthusiasm with which he led the Assembly during the fifty-seventh session.

Allow me also to express to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan our sympathy and admiration for the courage and the firm resolve that he places at the service of the ideals and causes of the United Nations, which is now confronting many exceptional challenges.

Finally, the Government of Chad would like to associate itself with other members of the international community to condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks against the United Nations offices in Iraq, which claimed the lives of several staff members of the United Nations, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello. These heinous acts of violence should in no way break our resolve to pursue the noble goals of our Organization, foremost among which is to help peoples in difficulty to fully regain their rights to lead

their lives in conformity with the values of freedom, democracy and justice.

I would therefore like to extend the condolences of the Chadian Government to all United Nations personnel, and the Brazilian, Egyptian and other Governments for the deaths of those who sacrificed themselves for the freedom of others.

If the international community has been thoroughly overhauled since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war, it has been victim to a new kind of trauma since 11 September 2001. Since that time, terrorism has been a dire threat to international peace and security. Globalization has complicated the rules of the game in trade between the North and the South, and new forms of conflict have emerged at the regional level.

The best response to all this must be based on collective and joint action. As a full member of the international community, Chad, which is faithful to its quest for peace, strongly reaffirms its resolute condemnation of any act of terrorism, act of violence or any use of force — in the defence of any cause — to resolve disputes among nations.. Such actions must be dealt with by our regional organizations first and foremost, and, if they fall short, to our common Organization, the United Nations. Although it has been the subject of some controversy, the United Nations continues to be the only Organization in the world to truly enjoy international legitimacy.

But to continue to best ensure that its mission and functions are carried out and to maintain its legitimacy, our Organization must enjoy the full support of all Member States. We must all contribute to assisting it in regaining its principal mission. The United Nations must once again become a common tool for us all and no longer be seen as showcase, much less a sounding board, for the will and power of the few.

It will undoubtedly achieve this goal all the more easily if the long-postponed reforms are successful and reflected in the enlargement of the Security Council to include new or emerging Powers of Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas — in sum, in recognition of the true state of the world today. This would do justice to those nations and render a service to the Organization itself.

In that respect, the Iraqi crisis has only further convinced us of the need to pursue those reforms. We cannot continually evade this crucial issue. Stability and international peace and security are at stake, for the kind of globalization that our peoples seek cannot evolve in the interest of all if the international political system is predominantly unilateral in nature.

Pending this revolution, which all peoples who cherish justice ardently seek, we still note with satisfaction that our Organization remains active in all crisis areas, particularly in Africa, where we urge it to be more proactive. Indeed, Africa is confronted with many difficulties that have ensued from both wars and other crises, as well as from a lack of good governance. The recent establishment of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) promises to save the continent from the economic quagmire in which it has been plunged. But the coherence of this extensive programme is connected with the support of the entire international community. The anticipated outcome will depend on true solidarity on the part of all economies worldwide.

My country, which has been committed to the path of democratic pluralism since 1 December 1990, has made significant progress. These efforts will be sustained until we have perfected the republican institutions provided for under the Constitution of 31 December 1996. The Government of Chad believes it important that this democratic process be achieved so that the rule of law and also peace and prosperity, which are the ultimate goals, might be attained.

To that end, in 1999 the President of our Republic promulgated, a unique type of law that sets out modalities for the use of oil revenues. This has resulted in a system in which a substantial part of this direct income —10 per cent — is set aside for future generations, and the remaining 80 to 90 per cent remainder goes to priority sectors — those vital areas I mentioned earlier — and the region of production receives 5 per cent.

Secondly, the law provides for an office for the control and surveillance of oil income. It is made up of nine members, including only one representing the Government, with five representing civil society and two the Parliament. As an independent body, that office will have broad powers and prerogatives, including authorizing expenditures from oil revenue and verification of their proper use.

In this new international context, in which States are increasingly interdependent and in which the world

has truly become a village, Chad, while addressing its internal problems, is endeavouring to open itself to the outside world. It is following with great interest developments in the international political situation and is working to make its modest contribution to the efforts of the international community in settling conflicts, especially in Africa.

Therefore, we note with satisfaction, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the new awareness of the parties involved and the emerging understanding, by the Congolese people themselves, of the enlightened self-interest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We fervently hope that the transition process will continue uninterrupted until the final return of stability to that fraternal country.

In the Central African Republic, realities in the field have shown positive change, but it is up to our Central African brothers to close their ranks to an even greater extent in order to consolidate peace in their country. The national dialogue under way offers them an excellent opportunity for a deep and constructive process of reflection on ways of bringing about national reconciliation.

With respect to our border with the Sudan, we welcome most particularly the prospects for peace that have been emerging in that long-suffering country. Accords were concluded on 3 September 2003 under the auspices of President Idriss Deby at Abeche in Chad, between the Government of the Sudan and the People's Liberation Army of the Sudan, and the protocol on security questions signed on 25 September between the Government and the SPLA also is a welcome development on the path to peace. Chad encourages the two parties to do their utmost to conclude a genuine peace agreement that would put an end to the sufferings of that fraternal country.

We note with satisfaction a trend towards peace and stability in West Africa. For us, the Ivorian crisis was a serious cause for concern. The Marcoussis agreements gave rise to a real hope finally to see a peaceful solution emerge. Today all eyes are turned to Abidjan, where the Transitional Government has the heavy responsibility of conducting national reconciliation in the interest of all the children of that country. Chad encourages the Ivorian people to help the Transitional Government to carry out its mission, so that peace might be consolidated in Côte d'Ivoire.

With regard to Liberia, we hope that, with continued international assistance, its situation will become stabilized. The participation of the countries of the subregion in peacekeeping operations and the presence of the Economic Community of West African States Mission in Liberia in Monrovia all give rise to hope and are a guarantee of political stability. The adoption of resolution 1497 (2003) was very timely. It represents a framework for settlement which should be used finally to break the infernal cycle of violence in that country. We would therefore like to ask the parties to the conflict to overcome their differences and work towards the return of a just and lasting peace.

I cannot conclude my words on Africa without joining my voice to those of other delegations that spoke earlier from this rostrum and welcoming finally the wise decision of the Security Council to lift the embargo that for years had penalized the fraternal people of Libya.

Outside of Africa, other hotbeds of tension remain, especially in the Near and Middle East, that require the involvement of the international community in the quest for adequate solutions. In the Middle East, the Israeli-Arab conflict has long been one of the concerns of the United Nations. Today conditions seem to have been met for a constructive dialogue between the two neighbouring peoples, since the road map containing the peace plan was agreed to by the parties to the conflict. This peace plan will, it is hoped, allow Palestine to achieve, by the year 2005, national independence and international sovereignty.

Regarding the Middle East, the Republic of Chad welcomes the interest shown by the international community in the restoration of Iraq's sovereignty and independence. We hope that the process of restoring power to the Iraqis will continue pursuant to Security Council resolution 1483 (2003) in a way that best serves the interests of the Iraqi people.

In East Asia, the question of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, territorial conflicts and terrorist attacks are jeopardizing stability, not just for States in the region but for the entire world. Nevertheless, we are pleased to note that a dynamic for peace has definitely begun to prevail in that region. We welcome, therefore, the holding of multilateral talks on the North Korean nuclear programme, and we encourage States in the region, whose role in this respect is crucial, to

become truly involved in order to facilitate the quest for a final settlement of that crisis.

We welcome also with relief the significant improvement that has taken place in the context of relations between India and Pakistan. This favourable climate will no doubt enable the two nuclear Powers to maintain good-neighbourly relations and to undertake the true problems of development.

Above and beyond these conflicts, which are all of great concern, there remain two major issues with which the international community has not dealt with courageously, in spite of good intentions and of the resolutions adopted in various forums beginning with the Millennium Summit. I am speaking of development assistance and of the fight against HIV/AIDS. Both are Millennium Development Goals with respect to which commitments were entered into here, in June 2001, at the special session on HIV/AIDS, and at Monterrey in March 2002.

While it is encouraging to note that the heads of State or Government of the Group of Eight, at their most recent Summit in May 2003, gave their support to the achievement of those goals, they still have to translate such commitments into action, as was emphasized by the Secretary-General in his report on the work of the Organization.

That means, inter alia, that developed States should implement the outcome of the Monterrey Consensus and the results of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in August 2002. But the conclusions of the most recent World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference in Cancún have shown that we have not yet embarked on that path.

We must all translate into action the Summit's resolutions on HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. Indeed, in spite of the increase in resources and the strengthening of the political commitment at the highest level — following the example of the commitment made by the President of the Republic of Chad — the situation remains one of great concern and calls for unfailing determination and exceptional efforts in order to stem this pandemic. I would almost say that we must invent a new kind of containment in order to stem the spread of this disease.

In any case, the disease is waging a brutal war against humankind, which must respond by utilizing the means required to fight a global war. This is a prerequisite for the survival of many nations throughout the world and therefore for the stability of our future world.

I cannot conclude without drawing the attention of the international community to the crucial issue of the representation of the Republic of China on Taiwan in our Organization. That country has diplomatic relations and relations of cooperation with many Member States, including Chad. Paradoxically, however, with regard to the United Nations, it finds itself without any status. Its ostracism is unjustified and unjustifiable.

Indeed, the Republic of China was one of the founders of the United Nations and was represented here from 1949 through 1971. The fact that this item comes up each and every year in the debates of the General Assembly proves that a substantive issue is at stake. Chad deems it inadmissible for 23 million Taiwanese to be discriminated against by the United Nations and its specialized agencies. It is thus unfortunate to note that, in the current context, the World Health Organization, for example, cannot lend Taiwan assistance in the event of epidemics, which was recently the case with severe acute respiratory syndrome. Yet the Taiwanese also have the right to live in serenity, to lead a democratic life and to be in solidarity with the world's other peoples. They need peace — the very foundation of democracy and a condition for development. Peace presupposes the resolution of conflicts through mediation. That implies, in both hearts and minds, a culture of tolerance and respect for differences.

We urge this session to put an end to Taiwan's exclusion by restoring its status as a full-fledged United Nations Member, and we take this opportunity to invite all States in the region to halt the military escalation.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Kokou Tozoun, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Togolese Republic.

Mr. Tozoun (Togo) (*spoke in French*): Again this year, we are meeting to assess our actions and to define approaches that can breathe new life into the Organization. Far from becoming a routine, our annual meeting is the high point in the life of the Organization, in that it offers to each Member State, through a frank and constructive debate, an opportunity

to make its contribution to the building of peace and security, which are indispensable to the just and lasting development of our countries. It is also an opportunity for us to reaffirm the paramount role of the United Nations in the world and to find appropriate ways to strengthen the Organization further.

Before I proceed, let me express — on behalf of the President of the Togolese Republic, His Excellency Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, and of the Government and the people of Togo, whom I have the honour to represent at this rostrum — my warm congratulations on the election of Mr. Julian Hunte as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. Our congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau. They can be assured of the full availability and cooperation of the Togolese delegation. I should also like to express our appreciation and profound gratitude to Mr. Hunte's predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, who led the work of the fifty-seventh session of the Assembly with dexterity and skill. To the Secretary-General, we reaffirm how much we admire him for the work that he continues to lead at the head of the Organization.

This General Assembly session is taking place at a particular time of evolution for the United Nations. Indeed, in the light of the grave events being experienced by today's world, the United Nations needs more than ever before to be strengthened so that it can fully accomplish the primary tasks entrusted to it by the Charter: inter alia, maintaining international peace and security and serving as a forum where the efforts of nations can be harmonized towards the achievement of collective development and shared well-being. It is obvious that the Organization's purposes and principles retain all their relevance and remain guideposts for action on the part of the international community.

In my delegation's view, this session must intensify its reflection with a view to defining new approaches that will enable the United Nations to search for more viable and lasting solutions to the problems of peace, security and development, which daily challenge the entire international community. We must therefore support United Nations actions, especially at a time when peoples are aspiring to more freedom and democracy and to greater involvement in the management of civic affairs.

The democratic wind that is blowing through our country is far more than an irresistible movement for renewal; it holds immense hopes for our people. For Togo, that is what has justified the people's support for the political reform that the Government has been undertaking for more than a decade and a half. Here, I should like to recall the faith and determination with which the Togolese Government — spurred on by of its head of State — is striving to build a democratic society that will take everyone's legitimate aspirations into account and that is rooted in the country's sociological realities. In essence, we are engaged in this democratization process in the conviction that the task — which will be long-term — requires much resolve, patience and self-sacrifice.

From this rostrum, I should like to stress that, through the recent presidential election — which was free, honest and fair in the general view of observers — a broad majority of the Togolese people demonstrated their political maturity and their keen sense of the general interest, which must take precedence over partisan and personal interests. In any event, I can assure the Assembly that the Togolese people — who know how to go the extra mile — are determined to move forward. The Government, for its part, is resolved to continue the process of democratization and establishing the rule of law, strengthening its foundations through the local and senatorial elections whose preparations are now under way.

One can never emphasize enough that the difficulties related to the whole democratization process are not limited to one country or to a specific group of countries; they are inherent in any endeavour whose objective is to involve people in the management of public affairs. The path towards democracy is long and fraught with pitfalls, but we are working tirelessly to provide the country with democratic institutions which are indispensable to the proper functioning under a rule of law. The quest for democracy — a contemporary development that Togo fully endorses — is a complex undertaking that requires time. Indeed, democracy can take shape only in an environment of peace and security, which alone can guarantee gradual assimilation of democratic values that are well understood and that emanate from the wisdom of the culture and traditions of the peoples concerned. In that spirit, Togo is striving to establish the rule of law in the hope that we will be understood by our partners.

Today, we can affirm that, despite the difficulties besetting our march towards the establishment of democracy, encouraging and concrete results have been achieved. Above and beyond institutional development, ensuring full human rights in all their aspects is a paramount necessity. Here, we wish to emphasize the Togolese Government's primary concern to guarantee and promote the economic, social and cultural rights of all Togolese citizens. The realization of those rights is of particular importance, for in them lie the interests of democracy and the stability of the Republic's institutions.

Indeed, if one takes a careful look at Africa's contemporary history, one will note that the many sudden changes and various attempts challenging democratic institutions in some countries result less from a misunderstanding of the democratic process than from the economic and financial difficulties felt by various social strata. The success of the democratic undertaking is therefore a function of the economic possibilities of the States that are engaged in it, and establishing institutions requires considerable resources that our countries cannot muster at the current stage of their development without foreign aid. If that observation is universally shared, why impose sanctions against — and suspend cooperation with — a country that, like many other States, has encountered difficulties in implementing its democratization policy and is undertaking notable efforts to establish the rule of law? Does my country, Togo, deserve the treatment that it has received for the past 10 years?

I would like, once again, to appeal for the resumption of cooperation with Togo. That is the appeal of an entire people. Peace and security, which reign in Togo, and the outstanding efforts to ensure economic and social development, despite the suspension of aid, clearly support the expectations of the Togolese people.

While the elimination of poverty is considered an essential task to be tackled to help a people or a country rebuild, it is also the same thing as giving it the means to consolidate democracy, which is essential to build a more just and peaceful world.

The need for solidarity, justice and equity must lead the international community, particularly the European Union and other development partners, to reconsider their position and to commit to supporting the reconstruction effort in Togo, a country that has made peace and security the very foundation of its internal and external policies.

That said, Togo believes firmly that the use of sanctions, if not properly measured and without time limits, will only increase people's poverty, particularly that of women, the elderly and children. Such sanctions provide, therefore, fertile ground for disorder and anarchy. The Assembly must, therefore, think about this question more deeply.

Our faith in peace and security is reflected in the concrete results of a bold and visionary economic policy, which is carried out untiringly, despite adverse times. This conviction is also justified by the fact that peace and social cohesion remain, undoubtedly, the basic factors, without which any socio-economic development would be carried out ineffectively and with only illusory results. Peace and security are, therefore, priorities for all countries, whether they are in Africa or elsewhere in the world.

At the African level, the head of State of Togo is very engaged in the process of conflict settlement. By way of example, let me recall prior outstanding and effective mediation efforts in which he played a role in settling crises that have afflicted Chad, Sierra Leone, the Great Lakes region, Guinea-Bissau and, most recently, Côte d'Ivoire.

Regarding its contribution to peacekeeping operations, I wish to recall that Togo is contributing in a meaningful and active way to the deployment of military or police contingents at the subregional level or in United Nations peacekeeping operations; in Namibia in 1989, in Rwanda in 1993, in Haiti in 1993, in the Central African Republic in 1997, in Guinea-Bissau in 1999, and recently in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.

With regard to Liberia, we welcome the establishment by the Security Council, on 19 September 2003, of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, which will be deployed on 1 October — in just a few hours. It will contribute to supporting in a meaningful way the peacekeeping force of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

My country, which contributed to restoring that peace by sending a contingent, urges the wealthy countries to contribute to financing the United Nations

force in order to provide it with the necessary means to accomplish its mission.

In the Great Lakes region, particularly the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Togolese Government hopes ardently that the new stage, characterized by the establishment of a new Government and other transitional institutions, will lead to stability, unity and national reconciliation.

In Burundi, my country welcomed the significant progress made on the basis of the Arusha Agreement, and it urges the parties to the conflict to work resolutely toward restoring peace to the country. Togo is very involved in the settlement of disputes in Africa, demonstrating clearly its firm determination to contribute to maintaining and to consolidating peace in the African continent. It was in that context that the President of the Togolese Republic advocated the establishment of an African peacekeeping force at the 1994 summit of the Organization of African Unity.

It is worth noting that that idea made headway in the Organization of African Unity, as is attested by the adoption at Durban, South Africa, of a protocol on the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, which demonstrates the determination of Africans to be the builders themselves of peace in Africa. It is also comforting to note that, within the context of that protocol, the establishment of a pre-positioned African peace force and a continental early warning system are taking shape.

My country is committed to making its contribution to the implementation of this collective approach to questions of defence, peace and security in Africa, and calls on the international community to firmly support the African continent with a view to guaranteeing the success of this effort.

Outside of Africa, we are constantly watching Iraq and the Middle East, always in the grip of violence. Regarding the Middle East in particular, my country considers that the definitive settlement of the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the conflict in the region, necessarily requires the cessation of violence and counter-violence and consideration of the legitimate rights of both people — the right of Israel to live in full security within internationally recognized borders and that of the Palestinian people to fully enjoy their national rights, including the establishment of a State.

In that context, we encourage Israelis and Palestinians to pursue dialogue, with a view to achieving a negotiated and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question.

Despite a new environment conducive to economic expansion, poverty continues to increase and remains a striking and paradoxical feature of our era. Peace and security will constantly be threatened if measures of justice are not adopted to push back the borders of poverty that weaken the foundations of our society.

The economic situation of developing countries, particularly in Africa, is a matter of great concern. The external debt burden, instability in export income and the devastating effects stemming from deterioration in terms of trade have largely contributed to aggravating the deterioration of socio-economic conditions in many African countries.

Speaking of international trade, it is unfortunate to note that, despite liberalization of the economy, industrialized countries continue to practice protectionist measures in the industrial and agricultural sectors. These measures, particularly harmful to developing countries, particularly African countries, impede the efforts made to restore increased export income.

Like many other delegations, Togo demands, therefore, that protectionist practices and subsidies be ended. That would contribute significantly to the development of poor countries. We believe that globalization must be accompanied by a greater spirit of solidarity and by a policy aimed at the purchase of products from the South at fairer and more lucrative prices.

In that regard, the Togolese Government wishes to emphasize that, if they are to benefit all, the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) must take into account the deep aspirations of developing countries, which demand that they be able to participate in international trade in conditions of equality and justice, as recently emphasized at Cancún.

At a time when our continent is doing its utmost to make the African Union the priority instrument to ensure peace and security and economic and social prosperity, the international community must become more involved to assist economic recovery efforts of

our States, in order to meet the challenges they face, such as poverty, the AIDS pandemic and malaria.

It is important that our common Organization mobilize its efforts even more in order to fight the evils that afflict the world and make it vulnerable. Terrorism would definitely be included among those evils. The terrible events of 11 September 2001 and the recent deadly attacks against the United Nations headquarters in Iraq and elsewhere, still alive within us, compel us to act promptly to eradicate this evil. My country, which has frequently been the victim of terrorist aggression, in 1977, 1985, 1986, 1993, 1994 and 1998, recognizes the importance of that challenge. This task should be one of our highest priorities if we wish to give future generations a sound world, in which respect for human dignity, love and fraternity are the foundation.

In order to achieve those aims, the United Nations must assume greater responsibility and provide more resources. It certainly needs to be substantially reformed. We would like to welcome the relevant proposals of the Secretary-General to establish a panel of eminent personalities from civil society to address this issue. We remain convinced that our actions, taken together, will lead to the reign of a society free from selfishness, violence, terrorism, disease and the threat of nuclear confrontation. May the work of this session lead each of our States to resolutely follow the path towards peace and ensure that all peoples, without discrimination, can enjoy the fruits of progress made by humanity in a climate of tolerance, justice, fraternity and solidarity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Hidipo Hamutenya, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia.

Mr. Hamutenya (Namibia): Mr. President, my delegation congratulates you on your assumption of this high office. We are confident that, given your vast experience and consummate diplomatic skill, you will be able to successfully manage the proceedings of this session of the General Assembly. I also wish to express our appreciation for the excellent and effective manner in which your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, conducted the work of the fifty-seventh session. In the same vein, I would like to commend the Secretary-General for his efforts to strengthen the role of the United Nations in resolving the world's burning issues.

Allow me also to pay tribute to the international workers who have recently given their lives in service to the United Nations in Iraq. In particular, we reiterate our condolences to the Secretary-General and the Organization for the tragic death of Sergio Vieira de Mello, that outstanding servant of the United Nations.

As we condemn terrorism and violence in all their forms and manifestations, we honour the memory of Anna Lindh, the slain Foreign Minister of Sweden, who dedicated her life to the pursuit of peace, development and social progress.

We appear here before this Assembly every year to renew our vow to the United Nations as the main guarantor of international peace and security. The speeches that we deliver here are a distilled expression of our collective passion for and conviction about the ideals that the United Nations stands for.

Yet, at times, as was the case with the war on Iraq, the United Nations gets sidelined and the unique legitimacy of its authority undermined through unilateral actions. Such actions produced a general feeling of fear and uncertainty, especially among the small and weak nations of the world. This is why the central theme that runs through nearly all the speeches at this session is the call for a return to multilateral dialogue, persuasion and collective action as the only appropriate approach to resolving the many conflicts facing the international community. Being a small country, Namibia echoes this call. Multilateralism must be the basis of global security, if smaller countries are not to feel that they are at the mercy of stronger ones. But, as recent events have demonstrated, big Powers, like the smaller ones, also need a multilateral framework as a more reassuring environment for the execution of foreign policy.

The President took the Chair.

We cannot fail to re-emphasize the inseparable link between international security and economic development. Therefore, the Organization must uphold the commitments made in the field of economic development, especially the important pledges made at the Millennium Summit and contained in the Millennium Declaration.

In that Declaration, world leaders committed themselves to help lift half of the world's poor out of misery and deprivation by the year 2015. We are talking here of 1.5 billion people around the world who

are today victims of abject poverty and 800 million who are starving. Still more, we are talking about the 900 million adults worldwide who are illiterate.

The tragedy is that this human misery is acquiring deepening and broadening dimensions at a time when human ingenuity is ever enlarging the horizons of possibilities of doing away with this terrible scourge of extreme poverty and deprivation. Clearly, therefore, the implementation of the Millennium Declaration is a race against time. Failure to act now, and to do so with a sense of urgency, will mean that we, especially the rich of this world, have failed to rise to the moral and political challenge, which is to protect that most sacred of all human rights, the right to life.

Namibia is fully committed to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. To this end, we allocate 23 per cent of our annual national budget to education and 15 per cent to health. In this commitment to invest in our people, we have proceeded from the premise that a fundamental way to address the problem of poverty is to improve the productive competitiveness of our economy, and that improving that competitiveness is dependant on the rapid increase in the knowledge, skills and capacities of the people, with a view to empowering them to be able to escape from the trap of poverty. Skills in the field of information technology are a critical element of our human resources development programme.

The other urgent challenge, spelled out in the Millennium Declaration, is the fight against the AIDS pandemic. Namibia is devoting considerable resources and attention to this seemingly daunting battle to contain the spread and limit the impact of this epidemic on our society. In this effort, we are working with other countries, relevant United Nations agencies, the private sector and members of civil society. In the context of this battle, the plight of AIDS orphans is given priority. However, there is a need for more generous contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

In the pursuit of Millennium Development Goals, Namibia is, furthermore, working closely with its partners in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to implement a number of key regional projects. One of these is a major power project, involving the power utilities of Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa and Namibia.

Similarly, Namibia, together with Angola, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, has embarked on one of the world's largest regional wildlife conservation and tourism development projects. The geographical scope of this area cuts across the territories of all five countries and covers approximately 278,000 square kilometres.

We would like, therefore, to reassure the Secretary-General that Namibia has, indeed, started in earnest on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and is staying the course. However, as I said earlier, there is still a great need for additional resources so that we can intensify our efforts aimed at development and poverty eradication.

For more than a decade now, the overwhelming majority of Member States, including Namibia, have been calling for the reform of the institutions of the Organization, especially the Security Council.

At the time of the founding of the United Nations in 1945, the Organization consisted of only 51 Member States. That number has now grown to 191 sovereign States. But the structure of the United Nations has remained in some respects unchanged.

The Security Council needs to become democratic and more representative — allowing other regions and States to be represented. There is a broad consensus that by making it a democratic body, and more representative, we would give the Security Council greater legitimacy and that that, in turn, would mean more effective United Nations machinery.

This call for reform is in line with the principle of democratic governance so often demanded of the developing countries by, among others, some of the Powers that occupy permanent seats in the Security Council.

We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General has taken on board the reform of the United Nations, and that it is one of the higher priorities on his agenda. We have noted with great interest his plan to set up a panel of eminent personalities to look into the reform process and recommend ways of effecting such a reform.

One of the issues that underlines the need for the urgent reform of the Security Council is the pathetic inability of that organ to bring the authority of the United Nations to bear on the situation in the Middle East. The unrelenting carnage that is taking place in

that region has not compelled the Powers that be to accept the fact that that situation constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Because of a lack of political will in the Security Council, there has been no ability to act collectively to put a stop to the carnage.

The continued occupation of the Palestinian territory exacerbates frustration and despair among the Palestinians. It follows, therefore, that the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel, is key to peace and stability in that region.

The implementation of the Security Council's plan for Western Sahara would have closed the chapter on decolonization in Africa. The right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and independence is a Charter obligation that we cannot shirk.

We hail the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States in Liberia and welcome the establishment of the United Nations Mission in that country. Guided by our commitment to African solidarity and given the resolve of the African Union to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, Namibia has decided to contribute troops to the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

Geographic proximity is not a matter of choice. We abhor the continued imposition of the United States embargo against the people of Cuba, and call on the international community to demand the immediate lifting of that embargo.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the vital importance of international cooperation by all stakeholders in our effort to realize the Millennium Development Goals. In order to reduce the scourge of poverty and underdevelopment, developing countries need access to the markets of developed countries.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to overcome the impasse which has developed as result of the failure of the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference at Cancún. We need to emphasize that urgent need. We call on the developed countries to demonstrate a spirit of compromise in line with their undertakings at the Millennium Summit.

Furthermore the implementation of the decisions taken at the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development must not be allowed to become a dead letter. The promise made by world leaders at the Millennium Summit to give globalization a human face should also be given practical expression.

In short, the vision of a bright and prosperity-enhancing new Millennium must not be allowed to become a mirage or a dream that could not be realized.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sodiq Safoev, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Safoev (Uzbekistan): I should like first of all to join earlier speakers in congratulating you, Sir, The Honourable Julian Robert Hunte, Minister for External Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of Saint Lucia, on your election as President of the General Assembly and to wish you every success as you carry out your duties. I would also like to extend our appreciation to Mr. Jan Kavan for the very efficient way in which he organized the work of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

We would like at the outset to express our profound condolences to the whole family of the United Nations for the loss of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a brave and able diplomat, and the other United Nations personnel who died as a result of the deadly attack against the United Nations premises in Baghdad.

I would like to take this opportunity to outline the position of Uzbekistan on the key issues on the agenda of this forum. As is well known, since the events of 11 September 2001, the world has been on the verge of a fundamental transformation caused by new challenges and threats to security in many regions of our planet. This harsh reality unequivocally increases the responsibility of the United Nations as a unique international institution whose role cannot be substituted by anyone or anything. It also increases the responsibility of each and every nation to preserve peace and stability in countering threats to modern civilization such as international terrorism, extremism, and the ever-growing illegal drug trade.

Given our immediate proximity to Afghanistan, we, the nations of Central Asia, know at first hand what these threats are and what they can bring to the world, if timely steps are not taken to prevent and eliminate them at their very core. In this context, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of the actions of the international anti-terrorist coalition led by the United States of America and of the International Security Assistance Force, which are doing so much to

revive and restore peace and stability in long-suffering Afghanistan.

In the meantime, despite the prerequisites for a full-scale peace process in Afghanistan and sustained development of the region, the peace in the country is still fragile. We believe that the resources of the international community, major international organizations and donor nations, as well as the capabilities of neighbouring countries, should be more intensely engaged, as they are essential to post-conflict reconstruction.

Afghanistan should become a harmoniously integrated part of Central Asia, and this will positively contribute to the enhancement of stability and security in the country and region. In view of the exceptional importance of the socio-economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is rendering assistance to the Afghan people in the reconstruction of damaged roads and the construction of new ones, as well as supplying electricity to the northern provinces of Afghanistan. Uzbek specialists have built eight large bridges along the road from Mazari Sharif to Kabul. Uzbekistan is also delivering humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. More than 1 million tonnes of humanitarian cargo have been shipped through our country's territory. We will continue to cooperate with international organizations, foremost with the United Nations, in this regard.

The lessons learned in recent years have confirmed that overcoming the consequences of terrorism and extremism is more difficult than their timely prevention. Moreover, the aggressive drive of terrorists to acquire weapons of mass destruction has become a new reality. The international community should confront these far-reaching plans using an effective and streamlined system of measures to prevent access by terrorists to arms, new technologies, and dual-use material.

Uzbekistan welcomes the progress made in the development of legal instruments aimed at combating international terrorism. Tangible results, however, can be achieved only by creating a global system of comprehensive cooperation. That is why we support the work of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee. We are confident that the regional anti-terrorism centre of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, established to collaborate with other similar centres, will prove to be an important component of the global anti-terrorist system.

To combat the threat of international terrorism and extremism, it is important to confront the hotbeds all over the world of extremism and the dissemination of the ideology of fanatical ideologies. Despite current measures to isolate them, these centres still possess substantial financial resources and the capacity to influence the hearts and minds of young people and mobilize them for their far-reaching objectives. In addition to the measures being implemented today, it would be desirable to establish a special United Nations programme to promote education and awareness among young people and develop in them a strong aversion to extremist ideology.

Uzbekistan maintains that the United Nations can and must play a more significant role in resolving the most urgent issues of today's world. For this purpose, first and foremost, United Nations programmes must become more concrete and effective so that they can better target the real needs of regions. In this regard, I would like to present the following views.

First, Uzbekistan unequivocally supports further development of regional integration and considers the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC) as a crucial mechanism of multilateral collaboration among the States of the region. We consider the Organization's economic component, as well as the establishment of water, energy, transport and communication consortia within its framework, as a priority.

The need to overcome the isolation of the region in terms of transport and communication is of utmost importance among the objectives vital for sustainable development of the Central Asian States. In this context, I would particularly like to draw Members' attention to the multilateral initiative to establish a trans-Afghan transport corridor, which would provide landlocked nations that encounter difficulties in accessing world markets with new access to seaports. Undoubtedly, the implementation of this project would boost trade and economic ties and fundamentally change geopolitical and economic realities in the region.

We believe it is high time for relevant United Nations agencies, above all the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to develop programmes aimed at increasing the volume of aid to

the region's States and Afghanistan for the purpose of developing transport infrastructure and providing real support in communications projects.

Secondly, Uzbekistan calls for strict compliance by all nations with a global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Today, in our view, the significance of the initiative of Uzbekistan and other countries of the region to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia has become paramount. We greatly appreciate the efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs in supporting the expert group, which is currently working on a draft treaty.

The establishment of the zone is nearly complete, and, to legitimize it, Uzbekistan calls on all permanent Security Council members to develop a consolidated position with the region's States on the provisions of the draft treaty and its protocol.

Thirdly, Central Asia is facing a wide-scale assault by international drug cartels, which are using the destructive power of international terrorism to protect drug routes. Under these conditions, there is a need for concerted efforts and effective international programmes under the auspices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

We believe that the establishment in Tashkent of the regional information and coordination centre to combat transboundary crime, proposed by President Islam Karimov during the visit of Secretary-General to Uzbekistan last October, could become a tangible contribution by the United Nations. We count on the support of the United Nations and donor countries in making this initiative a reality.

Today, the United Nations faces the need to adapt its mechanisms to the realities of the new world, which, we think, is dependent upon the prompt completion of the process of reform of the Organization. There is an urgent need to reorganize the Security Council so that it reflects current realities. An expanded Security Council should include both developed and developing nations. We reiterate our call for inclusion of Germany and Japan in the Security Council as permanent members.

In conclusion, I would like to note that the principally new approaches taken by the United Nations to the realities and prospects of Central Asia will ultimately meet the fundamental interests of the entire world community. I am confident that this session will give new momentum to the joint efforts of Member States to counter the threats and challenges of global and regional security.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Hor Namhong, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Mr. Hor Namhong (Cambodia): First of all, I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I am confident that, under your wise leadership, the work of this great Assembly will further strengthen international cooperation and will thus contribute to the maintenance of peace, stability and security in this globalized world. The international environment today remains, no doubt, uncertain, as the world continues to confront constant change and turbulence.

On the global stage, at least three key challenges continue to occupy the attention and remain a priority of the international community.

The first challenge is the global situation. First, the current situation in Iraq is a serious predicament. While the war is over, the situation in the country remains critical. Peace, security and stability have not returned to Iraq. Although the number of international contingents deployed in Iraq has been increased, the overall environment in the country is very fragile and highly unstable. I think that United Nations should assume a greater and more responsible role in returning normalcy to the country during the transitional period. The road to normalcy means that Iraq should be allowed to govern itself as early as possible, which can be done in several ways, including the holding of free and fair elections.

Cambodia strongly condemns the criminal attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, and it wishes to pay a tribute to all the victims, especially to Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Let us pay our respect to the memory of that great servant of peace. We in Cambodia always remembers his noble actions in Cambodia in the early 1990s in the framework of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia.

Secondly, regarding the Middle East quagmire, it is important that all parties to the conflict, particularly

Palestine and Israel, as well as the international community, continue to pursue a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict on the basis of the agreed road map of the Quartet. At the same time, I believe that it is vital for the leaders of both sides of this conflict to renounce the cycle of violence and overcome feelings of animosity and myopic interest. Instead, they should consider the broader collective interests of peaceful coexistence, a peaceful life for their peoples and stability in the region. There is a need for all sides to have a sense of political realism and shared determination to make peace possible.

I believe that today peace in the Middle East will come only when both Palestine and Israel reasonably recognize in every way that they must coexist side by side, living in peace and harmony with each other and looking after the interests of one another. Peace, tolerance and harmony are the only way forward for the people of Palestine and Israel. In that regard, the international community must remain fully committed to continuing to support the Middle East process to its end.

Thirdly, terrorism is still a very serious threat to humanity as a whole. Since the attacks of 11 September and the international reaction to fight terrorism, terrorists have been strengthening their worldwide networks. They also continue to kill innocent people everywhere in the world. In Asia and in South-East Asia, Jemaah Islamiah, which is linked to al Qaeda, has been responsible for a number of terrorist attacks in the region. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been actively responding to terrorism by strengthening cooperation at all levels, issuing various statements and taking concrete measures. Nevertheless, Jemaah Islamiah remains a significant threat to the region today, despite the progress in anti-terrorism action thus far.

Fourthly, regarding global poverty, we recall the Millennium Summit held in New York and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey and the recent G-8 Summit in Evian, France, where the overriding theme was the fight against poverty, which calls for concerted efforts for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. However, poverty remains a severe problem for the world, particularly the developing countries, with 1.2 billion people still surviving on less than one dollar a day. Despite clear messages from all those summits, especially from the developing countries, on the need to reduce poverty, the actions so far have not been decisive enough.

I believe that, without concrete measures and the provision of adequate resources, it will be impossible for the least developed countries to overcome the current challenges of poverty, aggravated by the speed of globalization, which has contributed to the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Fighting poverty is not the responsibility of the least developed countries alone. It is the shared responsibility of the international community, in which the developed world has an important role to play. Poverty prevails today in many forms and dimensions. For the developed countries to share resources with the developing countries is not only an act of generosity, it is also a requirement for living together in a world of peace, security and harmony. In that regard, I am convinced that the international community must act collectively and in a spirit of responsibility and solidarity to end this alarming situation of poverty by taking concrete steps to reduce it gradually.

The second major challenge involves regional developments. Regarding the regional situation, there have been many developments. Some have been positive; others negative. I wish to note several important developments since last year. First, the eighth ASEAN Summit and other related summits in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, have successfully advanced ASEAN integration by moving the region ahead in terms of establishing the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), deepening cooperation between ASEAN and China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, and strengthening cooperation with India. With those four countries, ASEAN has enhanced close and proactive cooperation among a combined population of more than three billion people that has enormous economic potential and opportunities for development and growth. In addition, during that ASEAN Summit, its leaders also held, for the first time, a summit dialogue with Africa through President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, the current Chairman of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD.

Secondly, the situation in the Korean peninsula continues to evolve and give rise to concerns for countries that are directly involved. Cambodia fully supports the peace talks in Beijing and believes that only dialogue and compromise can provide the way out

of the present quandary. Although a number of outstanding issues need to be mutually resolved, I think it is important for all the parties concerned to reduce tension by avoiding hostile actions that would escalate the situation. I believe that one way of enabling the situation on the Korean Peninsula to move ahead positively is to negotiate a road map for a nuclear-free and secure Korean Peninsula. I believe that, if such a plan could go ahead, steps towards the normalization of the situation on the Korean Peninsula could be taken.

Thirdly, I would like to refer to recent developments in Cambodia. The situation in Cambodia is continuing to improve significantly. The recent elections were held in a free, fair and democratic environment, as many international election observers noted in their statements. This year's election marks another important milestone in Cambodia's democratization, which has been strengthened at the grass-roots level through the successful local elections to communal councils last year. At the same time, Cambodia's gross domestic product growth continues to show positive signs, with an approximate growth rate of 6.7 per cent per annum over the past five years, despite natural calamities and the impact of other regional and global developments, such as terrorism and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

In addition, the Government's strategy gives top priority to poverty reduction. In March this year, the Cambodian Prime Minister, Samdech Hun Sen, officially launched the campaign for poverty alleviation aimed at reducing the poverty rate by 1.2 per cent every year. By 2015, the poverty level would be reduced to 19 per cent. In order to achieve that end, a budget of $1.5 billion has been projected.

The third challenge is the reform of the United Nations. Every year, representatives of every delegation advocate to the Assembly the necessity of reforming the Organization, in particular the Security Council. I, too, believe that without sufficient reform in this world body, the United Nations cannot be an effective and efficient global Organization that is able to respond collectively to the complex global challenges affecting humanity in the twenty-first century. The world has witnessed a wave of democracy since the end of the cold war more than a decade ago. I believe, however, that democratization needs to start right here at the United Nations, which should respect the will of the community of nations. Any further inaction on the part of the United Nations with regard to the call for reform will mean a continuing decline in its credibility, as well as increasing loss of confidence in this universal institution.

I believe that one of the key issues of United Nations reform is the need for the expansion of the Security Council. Cambodia calls once again for the expansion of the membership of the Security Council to include Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany and India as new permanent members, given the crucial role of these three countries in international political and economic affairs today.

Moreover, the General Assembly, as the highest body of the United Nations, should play a more important role, in accordance with the Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security. Furthermore, in the context of United Nations reform, I think that we should look beyond the conventional agenda of international peace and security, given that the glaring poverty in the world today is, without doubt, a peace and security issue. I believe that the United Nations should play a more meaningful role, within the broad framework of human security, in the world's collective efforts to fight poverty.

As the world marches on, I believe that we must perhaps devise new ways to deal with a myriad of challenges that menace the whole of humanity. We will have to close the gap between the poor and the rich and between the developed and developing countries. We must fight poverty and HIV/AIDS, which are affecting millions of people in the developing countries. We need to tackle together the growing impact of transnational crime. At the same time, we must pay greater attention to hotbeds of tension around the world in order to ensure a peaceful and secure world for all.

Finally, we must continue to ensure that the United Nations is truly a democratic global institution that reflects the reality of the world today. We need to advance together in peace, security, stability, development and prosperity in building a better place for all peoples on the Earth.

In conclusion, I believe the way forward for the world will depend largely on international cooperation and the need to share global resources more equitably. Growing interdependence and increasing globalization mean that every nation must work collectively in addressing the current challenges in the most effective way.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Francisco Guerrero Prats, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Guerrero Prats (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The international community is currently going through a period of reflection and self-definition. The great transformations that humanity experienced during the course of the previous decade, as well as current challenges, demand greater responsibility on the part of our nations in playing an active role in the search for urgent solutions to the problems that are affecting us. This new session of the General Assembly presents us with an excellent opportunity to achieve that goal.

Today, the Dominican Republic reaffirms its commitment to peace, the defence of human rights, security, sustainable development and the strengthening of democracy — pillars of indisputable importance in safeguarding international peace and stability.

The issue of the reform of the United Nations has been on our agenda for a long time. Events of recent years make it clear that this task must be undertaken as a matter of priority. The reform the Security Council is particularly urgent. Ever since the approval of resolution 47/62 of 11 December 1992, we have been engaged in an ongoing debate on the various reform proposals. Now, however, it is time to act to restructure the Council so as to make it more representative and equitable, as well as more transparent in its decision-making, thereby strengthening its legitimacy as the guarantor of international peace and security.

Terrorism has emerged as an ongoing threat to humanity. Uncertainty and pain have characterized the beginning of the twenty-first century. Our nations have the challenge of fighting together, at a global level, against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and in favour of equitable development and free societies. Security problems call for decisive action against international terrorism, organized crime and the illegal trade in arms and drugs.

The Millennium Summit established as one of its main goals the reduction of poverty by 50 per cent by 2015. Notwithstanding some progress in the achievement of those goals, poverty remains a terrible scourge. The Dominican Government, which considers that issue to be one of great importance, has created a Social Cabinet to act as a coordinating mechanism for all governmental institutions for social welfare, and is helping to ensure that both national and international resources are distributed equitably and allocated to regions that require social investment.

All countries must join efforts, accepting responsibilities, both shared and separate, to guarantee that growth and poverty do not go together and that, in meeting the needs of the present generation, we do not cause the destruction of future generations' capacity to meet their own needs.

The positive outcome of the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization, held in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001, and of the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002, was a key element for achieving millennium development goals. The Doha Development Agenda and the Monterrey Consensus provided a framework to facilitate market access, improve multilateral regulations for channelling globalization and increase financial aid for development.

However, we must mention what happened at the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) recently held in Cancún, Mexico. Although agreement was not reached because of fundamental differences in the positions regarding essential world trade issues, we are convinced that this will not affect the multilateral system of negotiations. On the contrary, some member states maintain that this impasse may even be necessary to shape more equitable international agreements at the heart of the WTO. What is an important issue is not to lose the development perspective within the work programme of the WTO, as set in the Doha Development Agenda, because that agenda includes the aspirations of millions of people around the world, whose hope for progress lies in the opportunities of the global economy.

The position of the Dominican Government with regard to the Middle East conflict is based primarily on unconditional adherence to the norms and principles of international law, particularly those related to the peaceful solution of disputes; condemning the use of force and terrorism in all its forms; complying in good faith with international treaties; and on strict observance of resolutions of the United Nations and its deliberative bodies.

Devoted to these principles, the Dominican Republic has, in response to the humanitarian appeals

of the Security Council, participated in the efforts to rebuild Iraq, in order to contribute to the development of a secure and stable environment in which the sovereignty of the Iraqi people may be restored.

Similarly, our country supports the peace process outlined in the road map submitted by the United States of America and endorsed by the Russian Federation, the United Nations and the European Union. We understand that a cessation of violence cannot be postponed, along with the historic pledges of all parties to make sacrifices to promote a lasting solution to the conflict and peaceful coexistence.

Drawing up sustainable development policies calls for dealing with problems before they emerge. This implies making headway in achieving the millennium development goals, particularly on crucial issues such as energy and protection of the environment. In this respect, our nation reiterates its rejection of the international maritime transport of radioactive and toxic waste, a position which has been expressed in other international forums. This issue is linked to international security.

The importance of guaranteeing women equal rights and equity, and promoting their increased political participation, has been a continuous concern of the heads of State in various international forums. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the only institution within the United Nations system dedicated exclusively to that end, has its headquarters in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Government calls upon Member States to continue supporting the work of INSTRAW in the Dominican Republic by providing contributions, to the extent that they can.

Our country commends the culture of peace, and is making efforts to ensure that at the primary level children are taught about promoting mutual understanding and learn about civics and human rights.

Similarly, we believe that a solid and permanent democracy is an achievable goal. The challenges here are clear: growing democracy, more respect for civic rights, freedom of the press; freedom of expression of political parties and public opinion; dignity and transparency of all leaders and the moral legitimacy of all.

Deeply concerned about the spread of HIV/AIDS in our nation, the Government has made great efforts to comply with the commitments entered into in the Declaration on fighting this terrible disease. We call for increased international cooperation and efforts to guarantee the availability of drugs at affordable prices, based on the Doha Declaration on intellectual property and the right to health.

The Dominican Republic salutes with optimism the role played by the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) in efforts to develop humanitarian aid programmes for the Haitian people. It is imperative to stress here the need for greater support from the international community for our neighbouring republic of Haiti and its neglected population.

Although we are aware that this issue has been excluded from the agenda of the current session , we wish to state our support for the aspirations of the Republic of China, Taiwan, to rejoin this Organization, of which it was a Member for many years. Our position is in line with the universal principles contained in the Charter, the basis of the rules of international law and the historical tradition of friendly relations with Taiwan.

On behalf of the Dominican Government, Sir, may I congratulate you on your election as President, confident that your conduct of this session will be successful, beneficial for the international community and a source of pride to your country, Saint Lucia, and thus to our Caribbean community.

I also wish to express the Dominican Government's rejection of the barbaric act perpetrated against the United Nations Mission in Baghdad on 19 August, and to reiterate to the families of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and of the other deceased colleagues our most heartfelt condolences.

We are all aware of the great challenges confronting humanity. Our future depends on the actions we take now. We have the opportunity to meet the expectations of the nations of the world. Let us take up this challenge with all due responsibility.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mateus Meira Rita, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

Mr. Meira Rita (Sao Tome and Principe) (*spoke in Portuguese, English text provided by the delegation*): I begin by joining previous speakers in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election. My Government is deeply gratified by the recognition of your accomplishments as someone from a country that is a member of the Small Island Developing States Network. We are confident you will lead the work of fifty-eighth session with the same abilities as your distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic.

On behalf of the people of Sao Tome and Principe, I would like to reaffirm the principles of the Charter and its role in promoting peace and development, and to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his dedication and leadership.

We all face daunting challenges. Violence has inflamed international relations. On behalf of my country, I would like to express our outrage and regret that the United Nations Mission in Baghdad was brutally attacked, with the tragic loss of such outstanding United Nations professionals as Sergio Vieira de Mello. We pay tribute to all those who died defending the peaceful path to peace and development in Iraq.

As we all are aware, Africa, perhaps more than all the world's continents, faces enormous challenges. We are plagued by endemic diseases such as malaria, which debilitate and kill our people needlessly. HIV/AIDS is devastating Africa's families, societies, cultures and economies. How can we have economic development when our people are too ill to work, or when the main breadwinner in the family is dying of HIV/AIDS, without any medical treatment?

Our economy has begun to feel the negative effects of these two deadly diseases. We urge all nations to work together to mobilize the necessary human and financial resources for the critical task of controlling these epidemics, which give rise to an unrelenting cycle of death and suffering for our peoples. There can be no hope for progress in Africa if basic health is not first ensured, so that the people can work and build their own prosperity.

Sao Tome and Principe, a small island State with a fragile economy, is struggling. We are proud of our democracy, our free and fair elections, our human rights and our rule of law. But in July of this year our proud and stable democracy came under threat from forces seeking to topple our constitutionally elected Government. They did not succeed, because the international community quickly intervened to support our elected authorities and to negotiate a peaceful end to the coup attempt, which restored our constitutional Government. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his personal concern for our country's well-being. I wish also to express my appreciation for the support of the African Union, led by President Chissano of Mozambique, and for the tireless assistance of President Obasanjo of Nigeria, as well as that of officials from Portugal, Brazil, the United States, Angola, Gabon, Cape Verde and the Congo, and the many others who rescued our democracy from peril.

But our democracy will remain under threat unless the Government can mobilize resources sufficient to provide basic services to our long-suffering people. For this reason, the people and the Government of Sao Tome and Principe ask for continued international support, with development aid, to improve the lot of our people and to ensure the survival of our young democracy.

We must all work together to strengthen multilateral cooperation and to ensure that the United Nations and all its agencies continue to be the forum in which all Member States can promote dialogue and ensure world peace, security, democracy and development.

My country regrets that international relations in some parts of the world have deteriorated to the point where extreme violence is the daily norm, infrastructures have been destroyed, and human rights are daily violated. We lament the plight of the refugees that this violence creates, and especially the plight of children, who often become the victims of those who traffic in human beings.

The tragedies in Iraq, the Middle East, Liberia and Afghanistan — to name only the most egregious — can be overcome only within the multilateral framework of United Nations. Unilateral actions are doomed to failure in the long run.

At the same time, Sao Tome and Principe supports an urgent reform of the Security Council, to make it into a body that reflects current realities and not those of the cold-war era. The Security Council must be democratised, with the expansion of the category of permanent members.

We observe with great concern the spread of terrorist acts across the globe, ranging from tragic examples such as what happened at Bali in Asia, to Palestine and Israel in the Middle East, to Spain and the United Kingdom in Europe, to Kenya and Tanzania in Africa, to Colombia in Latin America, and right here to New York and other sites in North America. But fighting violence with violence is not enough. We must go to the root of the problem, and that is the task of the United Nations.

The world is a less secure place today than it was a year ago. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction continues, non-proliferation treaties notwithstanding. We must ensure the universality of those treaties and compliance with them under the authority of the Security Council.

Sao Tome and Principe strongly supports the Millennium Development Goals, but much remains to be accomplished. The rules of the international economy continue to be dictated by a small number of countries that promote free markets while closing their own. The latest World Trade Organization meeting in Cancún is the natural result of this hypocrisy. Developing economies like that of my country can be competitive only if there is a level playing field, if all markets are open and if subsidies and protectionism are erased.

As an island nation, Sao Tome and Principe continues to see its very existence threatened by global warming. Our shorelines are eroding and our national territory is shrinking as the seas rise. Is my small country to end up as nothing but a tiny volcanic peak sticking up above the waves, with the last of our people clinging to the land left unclaimed by the rising sea? The Kyoto Protocol must be implemented by all for the benefit of all.

For many years, the people of Cuba have been living under an unjustifiable economic embargo. That economic embargo is hampering development, and people's lives would improve were it to end. The time has come for both sides to improve confidence-building measures by going back to the negotiating table and normalizing relations.

Mr. President, my country would once again ask for your attention with respect to the Republic of China on Taiwan. This is a country with a democratically elected Government which has built a strong economy and which has strong ties with many Member States. Taiwan was recently affected by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), but it was beyond the reach of the World Health Organization because Taiwan is not allowed to be a member — simply because Taiwan's people do not accept the imposition of the "one China" principle.

Despite its small size, Taiwan offers development aid to a large number of countries. Taiwan also contributes to international security by being a strong proponent of the fight against terrorism.

I wish to call to the attention of the Assembly that, under the universality rules set out in the Charter of the United Nations, the Republic of China on Taiwan must one day be here among us.

Our goal is to leave a better world for the next generation. We cannot go along with the concept of using force in international relations, and we denounce human injustice.

We decry environmental degradation, which ultimately threatens us all. Sao Tome and Principe urges dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding on the part of all Member States. We ask all to respect the United Nations Charter.

The President: I call on His Excellency The Honourable Henry Chimunthu Banda, M.P., Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Malawi.

Mr. Chimunthu Banda (Malawi): First of all, Sir, allow me to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session and also to commend Mr. Jan Kavan for his outstanding and astute leadership in presiding over the fifty-seventh session. I should like also to commend Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his dynamism and for the great leadership qualities he continues to display in steering the affairs of the United Nations. I wish to assure you of Malawi's continued support and cooperation as we deal with the challenges before us.

I would like to express Malawi's sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the senseless and barbaric attack against the headquarters of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, which resulted in the loss of a number of lives, including that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello. The attack should serve as a warning of our need to remain focused on the fight against terrorism to ensure that the

war against that scourge proceeds as a multilateral undertaking. We fully support the call for all those responsible for such attacks to be charged with war crimes.

Time has demonstrated the cardinal place of multilateral approaches to international issues and problems. The Iraq situation has revealed to us all in the international community the importance of multilateralism under the auspices of the United Nations, whose central role in addressing international conflicts should not be undermined.

Let me seize this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Government and the people of Malawi, my gratitude to the United Nations and its agencies, as well as to other multilateral and bilateral donors, for the emergency relief assistance given to Malawi and to other countries of southern Africa during the past two years, when our people faced a critical food shortage that threatened millions of lives. Their timely intervention enabled us to prevent a massive loss of life. We trust that the international community will also assist us in improving our agricultural production so as to prevent the recurrence of famine.

Africa continues to experience the effects of the tragedy created by the HIV/AIDS scourge. Our national budgets are seriously overstretched by the demands of care, treatment, support and funerals for HIV/AIDS victims, which occur on an hourly basis in an environment of devastating economic decline and famine. We are losing able-bodied people and professional expertise in all the sectors of our society two and a half times faster than we can replace them. We are grappling with the problem of caring for tens of thousands of orphans, whose numbers are increasing at an alarming rate.

The bleak and desperate situation created by HIV/AIDS urgently calls for concerted and practical international action to implement the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals in the fight against this pandemic. I would like to thank all those partners that continue to assist us in addressing this serious problem.

Malawi has paid close attention to the new international debate presently taking shape which advocates a qualitative paradigm shift from policy frameworks and mere commitments in conferences to the concrete implementation of an agreed action programme, or what has become known as the New Multilateralism which aims at addressing the serious shortcomings of existing multilateral policy prescriptions. The debate also seeks to effect a move in the right direction. My Government supports this important innovation and, especially, the newly-launched United Nations system wide integrated framework for least developed countries, jointly worked out by the six core agencies and designed to facilitate the effective integration of the least developed economies into the multilateral trading system.

We also support the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) mechanism for effecting increased coordination and collaboration at the national level in the preparation of development plans and programmes. We are keen to see a better-coordinated and integrated follow-up to, and implementation of, not only conference outcomes but also outstanding donor commitments to our development efforts.

In the same vein, the Government of Malawi fully endorses the current exercise designed to reform the United Nations. A more representative and democratic United Nations will enhance the efficiency and credibility of this world organization.

I cannot overemphasize the centrality of market access and trade to the whole question of poverty eradication, sustainable agriculture and rural development. We need to translate the debate on Western protectionism into a deliberate, broad-ranging global policy against trade barriers. Malawi is concerned at the collapse of the recent World Trade Organization meeting in Cancún, Mexico. We can only hope that the stalemate in the talks is only temporary. In the current unbalanced system of trade, low commodity prices on the international market have allowed a virtual free flow of our primary products to the West with a near-zero return on our agricultural sector, making it all the more difficult to develop the sector into a key catalyst for rural and sustainable development as a strategy for effective poverty reduction.

The world today is faced with multiple challenges, which have tested the resilience of the strong, as well as that of the weak. In Africa, the noble objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), geared towards enabling Africans themselves to assume full responsibility for

development challenges, can be meaningfully realised only with the support of the developed countries. So far, not much has been achieved owing to resource constraints. The resource pledges made by the Group of Eight at meetings in Canada and France must be honoured in order for the implementation of the NEPAD programmes to pull Africa out of economic stagnation.

We were heartened by the launch, early this year, of the road map for a Middle East peace with the expectation that it had established conditions for an irreversible transition to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State co-existing with the State of Israel. It is, therefore, regrettable that the road map is being frustrated by elements that do not wish to see peace take root in the Middle East. We call upon the Middle East Quartet and the Israeli and the Palestinian sides, in particular, to remain committed to the road map and to do everything in their power to make it succeed.

I would like to commend the Secretary-General, jointly with the Assembly and the Security Council, for having taken a number of decisive steps towards the resolution of conflicts in Africa, including through the framework of the open-ended ad hoc Committee. of the Security Council on conflict prevention and recovery in Africa. Malawi reaffirms its alignment with the position of Africa and the Southern African Development Community on preventive diplomacy, and commends, in this regard, the General Assembly work on a draft resolution on the prevention of armed conflict in Africa. We also support the Economic and Social Council resolution establishing an Ad Hoc Advisory Group for mobilizing assistance for African countries emerging from conflict.

The humanitarian tragedies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia remain a serious distraction from important national and regional development initiatives.

In this regard, we welcome the peaceful handover of the reigns of power in Burundi on 30 April, 2003, in accordance with the terms of the peace accord of August 2000. We also commend the successful establishment and launching of a broad-based Government of national unity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 15 July 2003 and the peaceful and successful elections recently held in Rwanda. However, it is important that war crimes committed in conflict areas be thoroughly investigated so that justice may take its course. This would help to check impunity, a phenomenon of most conflict situations. In this connection, my Government welcomes the announcement, on 16 July 2003, by the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court of plans to investigate war crimes committed in the region of Ituri in the north-eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Malawi believes that the United Nations can meaningfully advance the principles upon which it was founded and effectively deal with the multiple challenges that the global community is facing by taking an all-inclusive approach to its membership. It is in this spirit that my country has, time and again, called for the participation of the Republic of China in the affairs of this Organization in line with the principle of universality. Taiwan has a lot to offer in the promotion of the global common good, which the United Nations is here to advance. I therefore hope that the 23 million people of Taiwan will be given sympathetic consideration so that they may, once again, enjoy the right to associate with the world community through this Organization.

Next year will be an important one for the people of Malawi, as we will be holding the third general election of the democratic dispensation ushered in 1994. The elections will be tripartite, as they will include presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. The elections could not have been scheduled to take place at a worse time, given that the country has recently experienced a serious food shortage that has further strained the few resources available to it. However, in response to the demands of the country's constitution, the Government and the people of Malawi remain committed to fulfilling this constitutional requirement for good governance based on free and fair elections. Malawi seeks the cooperation, support and assistance of the international community to facilitate the entire electoral process.

May I conclude by conveying to you, Mr. President, to the Secretary-General and, indeed, to the United Nations family, the profound gratitude and appreciation of His Excellency President Bakili Muluzi and the people of Malawi for the support and cooperation extended to the President and his Government since they assumed power in 1994. As President Muluzi prepares to retire next year, after

serving the people of Malawi as President for two consecutive five-year terms, he is confident that the United Nations and, indeed, the international community at large, will remain committed to assisting the new leadership and the people of Malawi in their quest for meaningful and effective socio-economic and political development.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alfred Capelle, chairman of the delegation of the Marshall Islands.

Mr. Capelle (Marshall Islands): I am honoured to address the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, on behalf of His Excellency President Kessai H. Note and the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Allow me to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election to your high office. At the outset, I would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest condolences to the bereaved families that lost loved ones in the recent bombing attack on the United Nations offices in Baghdad. That tragic event was also a great loss to the international community. Such horrific acts of terrorism are utterly condemnable, and those responsible should be swiftly brought to justice.

My delegation is especially pleased that this session of the General Assembly will be presided over by the representative of a fellow member of the Alliance of Small Island States, and we wish you well, Sir, in your endeavours throughout the session. We are hopeful that your presidency will help to highlight the special needs of small island developing States. It has long been recognized that such States suffer particular disadvantages in terms of both environment and development. This was recently reaffirmed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which called for a full and comprehensive review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

The coming year will be a particularly important one for the Marshall Islands and for all small island developing States as we prepare for the 2004 International Meeting in Mauritius to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. In preparation for that Meeting, the Marshall Islands is currently completing an assessment of the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national level. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the international donor and development community to engage with the small island developing States in the preparatory process and to actively participate in the International Meeting so that it can produce successful and practical outcomes for all such States.

The Marshall Islands is faced with challenges shared by many small island States. Our land comprises small, scattered islands and atolls, spread over vast areas of ocean. Our unique environment is fragile and highly vulnerable to the threats posed by global warming and environmental pollution and degradation. Our natural resource base is extremely narrow, our economy very small and we are disadvantaged by our remoteness from world markets.

Given these factors, in our interactions within the international community, the Marshall Islands is particularly concerned about the following issues. The first issue is sustainable development. Pursuing the three pillars of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental — poses many challenges for small island States. During last year's general debate, we introduced our national blueprint for sustainable development. This document forms the basis of our long-term sustainable development plans, which we are currently working hard to implement.

In this context, and in the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, we continue to seek opportunities to form partnerships that will assist us in the practical implementation of projects under the Pacific's 14 Type II Umbrella Initiatives. Areas of particular importance for our people include the need for greater access to fresh water, the availability of affordable, renewable and environmentally sound energy sources and the development of waste management systems that minimize hazardous impacts on society and the environment.

Also in this regard, we welcome the new work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development. We are particularly pleased that small island developing countries will be considered as a cross-cutting issue in relation to the themes of each two-year work cycle, and that the theme of the 2014-2015 work cycle will focus on small island developing States issues.

Our second main area of concern is the environment, and in particular the threats posed by global climate change and sea level rise. These threats

are felt most acutely by low-lying island and atoll countries such as the Marshall Islands and many of our Pacific neighbours.

I am pleased to announce that the Marshall Islands has recently completed its ratification process for the Kyoto Protocol. I take this opportunity to commend those States that have ratified the Protocol, and I urge remaining States to do so without delay. This matter is surely the most urgent facing the international community today. If we fail to act now, the future will see the complete disappearance of many small island nations.

In relation to environmental matters, the Marshall Islands is particularly concerned about the state of the world's oceans and fisheries. As a nation whose very livelihood depends on the resources of the sea, the Marshall Islands Government reaffirms its unwavering support for the regime established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. I am also pleased to state that the Marshall Islands is now a party to the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement.

The Marshall Islands is seriously concerned about instances of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing within its exclusive economic zone. Such fishing gravely undermines the livelihood of our people that depend on these resources as their primary means of survival. Regional and international cooperation must focus on addressing this issue.

Within our region, we are pleased to note the recent progress of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. We are also particularly pleased with the development of the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy and we look forward to broad participation in the upcoming Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Forum.

An ongoing issue of major concern for the Marshall Islands is that of nuclear weapons testing. The people and the environment of the Marshall Islands continue to suffer as a consequence of the nuclear weapons tests that were conducted in our territory between 1946 and 1958.

As we continue to seek resolution of this issue our people continue to suffer from ongoing health effects, the food chain still contains dangerously high radiation levels and our development capacity is restrained by an inability to use contaminated islands and atolls.

I have briefly addressed a few issues of major concern to the Marshall Islands. There are, of course, many other significant issues to be addressed during the upcoming session.

One of the most important challenges facing the international community is the need for a comprehensive, unified response to combat acts of international terrorism. I am pleased to be able to say that the Marshall Islands has ratified all 12 of the core Conventions against terrorism. We are continually working to implement the provisions of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), and we have taken many steps at the national level to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. We reiterate our solidarity with all Member States that are working to eliminate terrorism in all its forms.

Another important issue facing this body is the continued exclusion of the Republic of China on Taiwan from the United Nations. The Marshall Islands Government reiterates its concern that the exclusion of a nation of peaceful and law-abiding citizens is not consistent with the inclusive ideal of the United Nations. I therefore strongly urge every Member State to reconsider this matter.

The Marshall Islands welcomes the progress achieved by the International Criminal Court over the past year. Many positive developments have taken place, not the least of these being the election of a prominent panel of judges and the chief prosecutor. We look forward to the Court becoming fully operational and we are confident that the Court will prove to be a valuable mechanism in the administration of justice at the international level.

Finally, in terms of the need for further United Nations reform, the Marshall Islands Government wishes to reiterate its support for the expansion of the Security Council. We believe that the number of both permanent and non-permanent members should be increased, and that such expansion should include members from both developed and developing countries. This expansion is urgently needed to increase the representative base of the Council and to enhance its legitimacy in the light of the geographic and political realities of the world today. We also wish to emphasize the need for further streamlining of the work of the General Assembly and its six Main

Committees in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.